
SELF-LIBERATION

*A Guide to Strategic Planning
for Action to End a Dictatorship
or Other Oppression*

Gene Sharp

with the assistance of
Jamila Raqib

Albert Einstein Institution

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SELF-LIBERATION

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Action to End a Dictatorship or Other Oppression

Gene Sharp¹

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Jamila Raqib

Which way to liberation?

Many people live in countries with governments that can be identified as dictatorships, or less harshly, authoritarian regimes. Usually, most of the people in those countries would like their oppressive regime to be replaced by a more democratic and free political system. But, how can this be achieved?

Dictatorships are not the only major type of oppression. Systems of social and economic oppression also exist. When people want to end oppression and achieve greater freedoms and more justice, is there a way to do this realistically, effectively, self-reliantly, and by means that will last?

Many people have sought answers to these questions and have worked hard to achieve liberation. Many additional people have tried to assist the oppressed people to end their subjection. However, none of us can claim to have offered adequate answers. These challenges remain.

In conflicts between a dictatorship, or other oppression, and a dominated population, it is necessary for the populace to determine whether they wish simply to condemn the oppression and protest against the system. Or, do they wish actually to end the oppres-

¹The author is grateful for the advice of Dr. Mary King and Robert L. Helvey, in addition to the general support of the Board of Directors of the Albert Einstein Institution, in the preparation of this document.

sion, and replace it with a system of greater freedom, democracy, and justice?

Many good people have assumed that if they denounce the oppression strongly enough, and protest long enough, the desired change will somehow happen. That assumption is an error.

There are dangers in seeking a better solution. Not all offered answers are equal. Some self-styled “revolutionaries,” despite their rhetoric, distrust the oppressed population. These “revolutionaries” believe that the system of domination can only be permanently removed if their own group of “guardians” somehow gains control of the State apparatus, and then uses its systems of administration and repression to remake the society, whatever may be the wishes of the supposedly “liberated” population.

These issues require new consideration.

The problem of how to remove dictatorships is generally addressed in this writer’s *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*.²

However, this strategic planning guide has a more limited purpose. It is intended only to assist people who wish themselves to plan a grand strategy, or super plan, to achieve their liberation from oppression and to build a more free and democratic system. Furthermore, this document is not only relevant to people facing internal dictatorships. It is also meant to be useful to people facing any kind of oppression.

This short document cannot include adequate in-depth presentations of all the knowledge and ideas needed for strategic planning of a nonviolent struggle for liberation.

Therefore, interspersed in this text are references to selected published readings covering those important topics. Careful study of these selected readings in the sequence recommended is essential. They contain much of the understandings, knowledge, and insights that may be useful in the preparation of strategies of liberation.

² Bangkok: Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma, 1993. Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2003 and 2008.

For definitions of strategic terms, read: *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 492-495; *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, pp. 444-445 and 454-461; and *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 504-510. Pages: 21.

NOTE: For publication information for these and all later citations, see the "Readings" section at the end of this document. Publications without a listed author are by Gene Sharp.

With use of this guide to strategic planning, it is hoped that future nonviolent struggles to lift oppression can be made more effective and also be met with fewer casualties.

At present, people living under a dictatorship or other severe oppression have few adequate choices as to how they can liberate themselves.

- A popular election to bring about the major change required for a more democratic and free political society is usually not available, is rigged, or its results will be falsified or ignored.
- Violent rebellion, including guerrilla warfare and terrorism, usually produces crushing repression, massive casualties, defeat, and, even if "successful," a stronger dictatorship.
- A coup d'état usually will fail, or simply install new individuals or a clique in the old positions.
- Gradual evolution may take decades, and may be halted or reversed, perhaps more than once.

In contemplating how to achieve liberation from oppression no one should assume that an easy way to do this exists. To the contrary, planning and implementation of effective action to lift oppression is always extremely difficult. Furthermore, it is most unlikely that liberation can be achieved without casualties. It should be remembered that any attempt by whatever means to remove a system of

oppression may be met with severe repression.

When facing the reality of extreme oppression and likely harsh repression, very often individuals, resistance groups, and most governments retain confidence only in military action to conduct the conflict. This is despite evidence that very often the consequences of using violent forms of conflict are disastrous. Regimes of oppression are usually well equipped to wage extreme violent repression.

Sometimes, people wanting greater freedom lose confidence that they can liberate themselves. They may even place their hopes in strong foreign military intervention. That option has grave disadvantages:

- A foreign government may use the problem of a dictatorship in another country as an excuse for military intervention that is actually intended to achieve different, less noble, objectives.
- Even if a foreign government initially has altruistic motives to intervene in such cases, as the conflict develops the intervening government is likely to discover that other more self-serving objectives are becoming open to them. These may include control of economic resources or establishment of military bases.
- A government with enough military capacity to remove a strong system of oppression in another country is usually powerful enough later to impose its own objectives. This can happen even when the objectives are unwanted by the “liberated” population.

In contrast, a realistic self-reliant capacity to end a dictatorship or other oppression not only addresses the current system of oppression. That capacity for self-reliant liberation also removes credibility from a false claim by an intervening government that its objective is to promote greater freedom or justice when its real objective is quite different.

What other option for liberation is available?

Important spontaneous or improvised nonviolent struggles against dictatorships and other oppression have occurred in the past. They have produced varying results: some failures, some successes, and some mixed consequences.

These public protests, acts of noncooperation, and disruptive interventions have at times not only caused acute problems for oppressive systems and defeated autocratic rulers. On occasion, they have even caused oppressive systems and brutal dictatorships to collapse.³

A few of those nonviolent struggles involved charismatic individuals, such as Mohandas K. Gandhi. However, those cases are not typical. The widely neglected history of the use of this technique refutes most of the widespread preconceptions and misconceptions about nonviolent struggle.

In recent decades, the several revolutions and rebellions known as the “color revolutions” have been well known. These cases are hopeful because they involved the participation of masses of people in predominantly nonviolent struggles with significant effectiveness. The results achieved by these cases have depended on various factors, including the situation, knowledge of earlier cases, the presence or absence of a wise strategy, the degree of planning that was possible and utilized, and the methods used.⁴

Moving beyond past experiences

There is still much to learn about how this nonviolent technique operates. However, historical applications and our present knowledge have now advanced to a point where not only can greater use

³ See Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973); Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston: Extending Horizons, Porter Sargent Publishers, 2005); and Ronald M. McCarthy and Gene Sharp, with the assistance of Brad Bennett, *Nonviolent Action: A Research Guide*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997.

⁴ For a list of factors influencing whether a given application of nonviolent action will succeed or fail to achieve its objectives, see Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 815-817.

of this technique be expected in conflicts. Very importantly, with greater knowledge, wise strategic calculations, expanding experience, planning, and increased skill in action, the effectiveness of future nonviolent struggles against oppression can almost certainly be considerably increased. That should not be surprising because the results of virtually any type of activity can be significantly enhanced by deliberate efforts.

As compared to the other possible ways of acting mentioned earlier, strategically planned nonviolent struggle appears to be a serious option in efforts to achieve a more democratic, free, and just system. Persons and groups that decide to explore the potential of this option for achieving greater freedom and justice are to be congratulated. However, they face a difficult task.

Major change will not happen solely by asserting a long-term goal and by protesting against the status quo. Responsible, wise, and effective strategic action is required. In the face of felt oppression strategic nonviolent struggle can become a viable alternative both to violence and also to passive submission.

This document and the designated readings are intended to assist those persons and groups facing oppression who seek greater knowledge and understanding about the nature and potential of strategic nonviolent struggle. The contention of this document is that strategic planning can contribute in major ways to making the application of nonviolent struggle significantly more effective than protests and resistance without strategic planning. Very importantly, contemplation of what may happen after this initial conflict requires advance consideration and some planning for the post-conflict political order.⁵

Pragmatic and strategic

The approach here is pragmatic and strategic. It is based on reality,

⁵ See the later discussion on the dangers of a coup d'état.

and not on beliefs, although the two can be compatible.⁶

The purpose of this guide is to assist a group that wishes to end a dictatorship or other oppression, and replace it with a more free and just system, to plan how to wage their struggles effectively. How can people use their available resources efficiently to end oppression and replace it with a durable, more free and just system?

Wise planning can also help to keep casualties low. Certain methods may be particularly provocative and can make demonstrators easy targets for the oppressors' troops. In contrast, certain other methods may have greater impact while not being likely to increase casualties. For example, one plan might be for protesters to march down a street toward the troops that are armed with machine guns. Another plan might be to urge resisters to leave the streets empty and silent, and to stay in their homes for a period of time.

Gaining new knowledge

For some years, several of us concerned with the application of nonviolent struggle to achieve liberation from oppression focused on providing the needed basic understanding of nonviolent action and the importance of strategic planning through lectures, courses, and workshops. These were offered by a single person or by a team, over more than a decade in diverse countries in Europe and Asia.

The content of some of these presentations was introductory, but the content of others was advanced. Sometimes the presentations were offered as a course of up to two weeks with both morning and afternoon sessions. One two-week workshop with lectures was focused on how that same group could later plan a grand strategy for their struggle.

⁶ For descriptions of several types of principled nonviolence, see Gene Sharp, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist with Essays on Ethics and Politics*, Chapter 10, "Types of Principled Nonviolence," pp. 201-234. For an analysis of how the principled and pragmatic approaches can be related, see Chapter 13, "Nonviolence: Moral Principle or Political Technique? Clues From Gandhi's Thought and Experience," pp. 273-309. See also Sharp's lecture "What Are the Options in Acute Conflicts for Believers in Principled Nonviolence?" delivered September 22, 2006 at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace at Notre Dame University. Available on the web site www.aeinstein.org

These lectures, courses, and workshops seemed at the time to be adequate. How are they now to be evaluated?

It is clear that spoken presentations can be useful and effective in introducing subject matter to new people and arousing interest where there has previously been little or none. Spoken presentations in the form of “training” sessions prior to a particular demonstration in a limited campaign can also be very useful in preparing participants for effective behavior during a planned demonstration.

These positive consequences of certain spoken presentations are important, but they are insufficient to help people to conduct strategic planning. It seems clear that the knowledge and understanding needed for strategic planning and advanced applications cannot be adequately conveyed by talks and workshops. This conclusion also applies to discussions, even if some of the participants are well informed. It applies to lectures, as well, even if the lecturers are very knowledgeable and experienced.

Spoken presentations alone are quite inadequate:

- to convey advanced knowledge; and
- to prepare listeners to develop strategic analyses.

As time passed, the groups that received the lectures, courses, and workshops appear to have remained unable themselves to plan grand strategies for their conflicts. Those groups have usually been unable even to prepare strategies for smaller limited campaigns intended to achieve modest goals.

After considerable time, there often remains little evidence that the presented basic knowledge and understanding has been absorbed by the participants sufficiently to affect their later decisions and activities, much less to enable them to plan strategies.

Many people have limits on what they can understand solely through listening. It appears that the amount and type of needed knowledge and understanding of nonviolent struggle is both too large and too complex to be readily absorbed from spoken presentations alone.

Significant interest has been aroused for the “training the trainers” approach. On the surface it appears to be very useful as a way to help large numbers of people to become competent nonviolent actionists for future demonstrations. Instructions based on this model may contribute usefully to that specific end. However, this approach is highly questionable for advanced purposes.

This approach almost by definition is not able to prepare anyone to plan strategies at any level. This is because the approach trivializes the amount of knowledge needed by a person who attempts to plan strategies. It also assumes that the necessary knowledge and understanding can be successfully transferred verbally twice and then applied in strategic planning. That is extremely doubtful. The guidance for strategic planning offered in this document remains relevant.

There are good reasons to explore additional ways by which oppressed groups can learn how to plan their own strategies for their liberation struggles. It is possible that the needed knowledge and understanding might be better absorbed if these can be provided through some other means.

Baltic and Balkan experiences

At least two major cases exist of unusually effective results from exposure to information about nonviolent struggle. These are the consultations with pro-independence leaders in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in 1991 and the workshop in 2000 for Serbs who wanted to end the Milosovic dictatorship. These two cases are sufficiently different from others that they merit attention.

The three small, previously independent, Baltic nations had been annexed by the Soviet Union, occupied by Nazi Germany, and again incorporated into the Soviet Union. Those events brought catastrophic changes, significant destruction, mass killings, huge deportations, major population shifts, and imposition of cruel regimes. Various types of resistance were conducted against those measures. Significant guerrilla resistance was waged against Soviet rule, in

Lithuania (1944 to 1952), Latvia (1941 to 1944-1945), and Estonia (1944 to about 1949).

Following the end of the guerrilla struggles, and to a degree during them, the populations conducted very important nonviolent protests and resistance. Those actions were carried out in the later years with the encouragement or assistance of the pro-independence political parties and finally elected pro-independence governments.

These early movements were completely indigenous, and, as far as known, uninfluenced, or very little influenced, by outside sources of information about nonviolent struggle.

After very significant nonviolent protests and resistance had already taken place, consultations about the nature of nonviolent struggle and civilian-based defense⁷ were provided in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in 1991 by representatives of the Albert Einstein Institution. The first consultation was conducted by Gene Sharp, Bruce Jenkins, and Peter Ackerman, and the second was conducted by Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins.⁸ They met with pro-independence party members and leaders and elected government officials. The consultants also provided lectures and talks and held informal discussions with high-ranking government officials, committees, and members of the parliaments. The focus of all these explorations was the nature and potential of nonviolent struggle. The consultants did not advise anyone on what to do in their struggles.

Audrius Butkevicius, then Director General of National Defense of Lithuania, had received early page proofs of the new book *Civil-*

⁷ Planned organized nonviolent noncooperation and defiance against foreign occupations and coups d'état.

⁸ These consultations at the invitation of the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs occurred during April 24 to May 1, 1991. The second trip to the capitals of Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia took place from November 14 to December 7, 1991. They held discussions on the potential of organized civil resistance to block attempted coups d'état and foreign invasions. See The Albert Einstein Institution, Biennial Report 1990-1992, pp. 5-9 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993). Following this first trip, at the request of Audrius Butkevicius, Bruce Jenkins assembled a major study guide on civilian-based defense to be used by a team of researchers in the Lithuanian Department of National Defense.

*ian-Based Defense*⁹ from Dr. Grazina Miniotaite of the Lithuanian Academy of Science. She had received the page proofs from Sharp and Jenkins at a conference in Moscow. Butkevicius made fifty photocopies of the page proofs and sent them throughout the Soviet Union, including to neighboring Latvia and Estonia. After reviewing the book, Butkevicius exclaimed, "Ah, there is a system to this!"¹⁰

The earlier improvised symbolic nonviolent protests (such as the human chain of more than two million people linking the Baltic capitals) later became more systematic and deliberate forms of official nonviolent noncooperation and defiance.¹¹

The creation of new institutions favoring independence, and also the shifting of existing institutions to favor independence, were major characteristics of these movements. Soviet President Gorbachev pronounced the declarations of independence by the Baltic

⁹ By Gene Sharp with the assistance of Bruce Jenkins, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.

¹⁰ Butkevicius had a quick Lithuanian translation of *Civilian-Based Defense* made for government use. Latvian Defense Minister Talavs Jundzis also had a quick translation made for government use. The English original was used by State Minister Raivo Vare in Estonia.

This book was later published in the three languages, in Estonian by Informare in Tallinn, in Latvian by Junda Publishers in Riga, and in Lithuanian by Mintis Publishers in Vilnius, all with the backing of the respective ministers responsible for defense.

On the second trip, Sharp and Jenkins met not only with Lithuanian defense officials but also in Latvia with Defense Minister Talavs Jundzis and other members of the Latvian Supreme Council and defense officials. In Estonia, Sharp and Jenkins met with State Minister Raivo Vare, together members of the Defense Commission, and defense and government officials. Minister Vare sent instructions for nonviolent resistance to political centers throughout Estonia, but deliberately did not retain copies in his office.

In December 1991 Butkevicius credited the book *Civilian-Based Defense* with having provided the basis for much of his planning of nonviolent resistance against the Soviet occupation, first in January 1991 and later in August 1991.

¹¹ See Olgerts Eglitis, *Nonviolent Action in the Liberation of Latvia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Albert Einstein Institution, 1993) and Grazina Miniotaite, *Nonviolent Resistance in Lithuania* (Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2002).

For a much more comprehensive and detailed study of the nonviolent liberation struggle in Latvia, see Valdis Blūzma, Talavs Jundzis, Janis Riekstins, Gene Sharp, and Heinrihs Strods, *Non-violent Resistance: the Struggle for Renewal of Latvian Independence (1945-1991)*. Riga: Latvian Academy of Sciences, UlzeUpmale, Akademijas laukums 1, Riga LV-1050,2009.

nations to be null and void.

Audrius Butkevicius, later as Minister of Defense, credited the Civilian-Based Defense book as being the basis of the Lithuanian strategies. Latvia's Defense Minister Talavs Jundzis and Estonia's State Minister Raivo Vare made similar statements.

On January 13, 1991 the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Boris Yeltsin, signed a joint statement in Tallinn, Estonia, with the leaders of all three Baltic nations. The joint statement pledged mutual help and assistance, and protests against any military interference in their affairs. Negotiations later led to a complete withdrawal of Soviet troops.

The casualties of dead in Lithuania were fourteen at a large demonstration at the television tower and after independence six at a frontier customs barracks; six in Latvia; none in Estonia. Yet all three Baltic nations had successfully seceded from the intact Soviet Union despite their vulnerable locations, their being already occupied by the Soviet army, and the overwhelming military might of the Soviet Union.

In Serbia, improvised symbolic nonviolent protests, often in freezing temperatures, had been conducted in the late 1990s by Serbs opposed to the dictatorial rule of President Milosovic.

Information about nonviolent struggle was provided by Robert L. Helvey during a workshop held in Budapest, Hungary in 2000. The participants were young Serbs from the political resistance organization Otpor. Helvey combined his own systematic presentations with recommended major readings, both *From Dictatorship to Democracy* and *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* by Gene Sharp. This workshop seems to have had very positive results. Helvey left copies of those books with the participants to take back to Serbia. From *Dictatorship to Democracy*, published in Serbian by the organization Civic Initiatives, also had a major influence.¹²

Srdja Popovic, a leading strategist of the Serbian group that had met with Helvey in Budapest, had previously explored the practices

¹² The English language text had been given to them by Marek Zelaskiewz from California.

of diverse organizations and institutions. He was seeking possible lessons relevant to taking action to end the Milosovic dictatorship.

After studying *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Srdja Popovic wrote that “. . . Sharp’s work offered an astoundingly effective blueprint for confronting a brutal regime while engaging the population into a pluralist, nonviolent struggle for self-liberation.”¹³

Srdja Popovic and his colleagues focused on the six necessary sources of political power¹⁴ as providing the key to undermining repressive regimes: shrink or sever those sources and the regime is weakened or disintegrated.

In all three Baltic nations and in Serbia, there were five common factors:

- (1) All four countries had suffered under extremely brutal regimes.
- (2) Each, in earlier years, had experienced significant, but unsuccessful, violent struggles.
- (3) There had already been by 1990 in the case of the Baltic nations, and by 2000 in the case of Serbia, major, indignously organized popular nonviolent protests and resistance.
- (4) In-person spoken presentations and discussions then occurred involving external specialists with backgrounds of years of research and analysis of nonviolent struggle against dictatorships, foreign occupations and coups d’état.
- (5) These spoken presentations were combined with important printed readings about political power and nonviolent

¹³ “CANVAS TOTAL INDEX: *Serbian Arena for NonViolent Conflict: An Analytical Overview of the Application of Gene Sharp’s Theory of Nonviolent Action in Milosovic’s Serbia.*” Photocopied text, 8 pp., Belgrade, 2001. CANVAS is an acronym for the Centre for Applied NonViolent Action and Strategies in Belgrade, Serbia.

¹⁴ Identified in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

struggle against dictatorships and aggression that were made available to important governmental and non-governmental political leaders in the case of the Baltics and to nongovernmental political leaders in the case of Serbia.

Earlier planning

Thinking and planning about how to make a particular nonviolent protest or struggle more effective are both desirable and possible. Such planning is not entirely new. There are a variety of examples of past planning.

In earlier small-scale campaigns, such as a bus boycott, or a lunch-counter sit-in against racial segregation in the United States, there was planning. Similarly, for many decades there have been tactical preparations for days-long or weeks-long protest marches for peace, social justice, woman suffrage, civil rights, human rights, and environmental protection.

In various general strikes in several countries for economic and political goals there have been planning and preparations. As far back as in the American colonial nonviolent struggles from 1765 to 1775 against British regulations there was not only tactical, but even long-term strategic planning.¹⁵

Rarely, there has been a brilliant intuitive strategist, such as Mohandas K. Gandhi, who outlined strategies to be implemented in tactical steps.

In Poland in the 1980s masses of people in the struggles of the independent trade union Solidarity and related groups, with guidance based on their historical experience, and with difficulties, achieved self-liberation. In Serbia in 2000 there were advance calculations, activities, preparations, and strategic planning for the struggle to bring down the Milosovic dictatorship.

However, in many conflicts waged by nonviolent struggle

¹⁵ See Walter H. Conser, Jr., Ronald M. McCarthy, David J. Toscano, and Gene Sharp, editors, *Resistance, Politics, and the American Struggle for Independence, 1765-1775*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986. Note especially "Appendix F, Continental Association, October 1774."

this has not been the case. Frequently, there has been a complete absence of strategic calculations, and at times inadequate planning. Nevertheless, there have been some remarkable successes.

It should also be noted that there have been many cases of only very limited gains. There have also been disastrous defeats and horrendous casualties, as in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China. Such defeats and casualties need to be reduced in the future, simultaneously as greater successes are achieved.

More complete and sound strategic planning may help to increase the effectiveness of future nonviolent struggles against extreme oppression and also reduce casualties. However, dependence on outside advisors to provide this planning can be risky and unwise. It is desirable that knowledge of how to develop strategies be readily available, so that the people facing dictatorships and other oppression can plan how self-reliantly to lift their oppression.

A new model for self-reliant planning?

As already discussed, it appears that for this subject matter, spoken presentations yield more limited comprehension than does careful study of printed presentations and analyses. Printed materials can be read at a time and location of one's choosing, and can be studied slowly when needed, repeated, and reviewed.

This document explores the development of a new model to assist persons and groups that wish to examine the possible potential of nonviolent struggle for liberation from oppression. This model may also help people to develop their knowledge, understanding, and thinking so that they can learn how to act more effectively in conflicts with extreme opponents. In order to achieve this, significant study is required of selected printed studies of the operation of nonviolent struggle and of analyses of its potential in those acute political conflicts where harsh repression should be expected.

If the analysis in this document is judged to be potentially helpful, wide dissemination and study of the recommended published texts on nonviolent action is encouraged. Such wide dissemination of knowledge and understanding can also counteract any possible

tendencies toward elitism. The in-depth knowledge can be diffused among many people and not remain the possession of a small minority. The ability to plan future struggles to achieve and defend liberation can be spread widely. This can have major consequences.

This alternative route to knowledge, if followed carefully, should eventually enable persons and groups to become capable of self-reliantly preparing a grand strategy for a major conflict. It should also help people to prepare individual strategies for component limited campaigns.

A developed wise grand strategy then enables the participants in a struggle to act in ways that cumulatively bring closer the achievement of their objectives in a conflict. This can be done while they simultaneously confront the policies, actions, and repression of their oppressors.

These accomplishments will not be delivered ready made on a silver platter. The studies and planning recommended here can only produce positive results when the newcomers to this approach to empowerment make the expanded knowledge their own. Then, with sound analyses and careful planning, disciplined and courageous action, it may be possible to move from the current oppressive system to an improved society built on the foundations of responsibility and freedom.

Three types of knowledge

From study, observation, and analysis, we know that three types of knowledge are required in order to enable persons to develop a competent grand strategy to achieve a successful liberation struggle:

- (1) Knowledge of the conflict situation, the opponents, and the society and its needs.
- (2) In-depth knowledge of the nature and operation of the technique of nonviolent action.

- (3) The knowledge and ability required to analyze, think, and plan strategically.

It is foolish, and potentially disastrous, for any group to initiate a struggle against a dictatorship or other system of oppression, or even to attempt to prepare a grand strategy for such a struggle, without all three of these types of knowledge.

Recognizing this, someone recommended bringing together three groups, each of which has one of these types of expertise, to be shared with the others. It was thought that the three groups together in the same room could produce a competent grand strategy. Unfortunately, putting three groups of persons, each group possessing one of the three needed types of knowledge, together cannot achieve the needed result.

This is because the particular expertise of each group would then remain within the minds of each separate group. The analytical capacity that is capable of producing a wise grand strategy must involve the integration of these three types of knowledge and thinking. All three types of knowledge need to be present in the minds of the same persons who are preparing the draft strategy, not merely present among three groups that have been brought together.

It is necessary to explore how all of these three types of knowledge and skills can be integrated in order to formulate a competent grand plan for achieving empowerment and democratization. This integrated knowledge is also needed for the planning of the limited component campaigns intended to achieve smaller objectives.

(1) Knowledge of the conflict situation, the opponents, and the society

People living under dictatorial rule or other forms of oppression are likely already to have considerable knowledge of the system under which they live. Therefore, they have some power potential. "Power potential" refers to the qualities, resources, and capacities

that, if mobilized and applied, can enable the group to wield significant power in a conflict.

The following questions may be useful in clarifying this knowledge:

- What are the issues at stake in the conflict?
- How important are the issues to each side?
- Have the issues, or has the intensity of commitment to them, varied over time?
- How easy or difficult would it be for each side to make concessions to the other side?
- Are the possible concessions beneficial or harmful to the resisters against the oppression?
- What ways might there be for the resisting population to mobilize other persons and groups to participate in a struggle over these issues?
- How can the real issues be used to advance mobilization of resistance, to shrink support for the opponents, and to change loyalties within the opponent group and third parties?

Exiles may lack some of this knowledge, although they may have other strengths. They may have information and insights that most people living inside that society lack.

In assessing the present situation in the country, it may be useful to prepare an assessment of the absolute and comparative strengths of the oppressive system and of the existing and potential democracy movement. Where are the opponents strong and where are they weak? Where are the resisters strong and where are they weak? This can be done by making a strategic estimate.

The strategic estimate is explained in these readings: *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, pp. 525-541; Robert L. Helvey *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, pp. 47-65, and 165-166. Pages: 38. Total pages to this point: 59.

However, in developing a strategic estimate it is necessary to be careful that the members of the strategic planning group do not get obsessed with the details of the strategic estimate and neglect the major factors in the overall situation.

The main point is to know the strengths and weaknesses of both sides, their sources of power, and the likely impacts of the use of the power of both sides in an open conflict. How do those strengths and weaknesses compare with each other? Also, *how might the respective strengths and weaknesses of the two sides be changed?*

Clearly, it is desirable to have advance awareness of the means of violent repression and other controls that the opponents can apply in efforts to halt the noncooperation and defiance. That information must be taken into consideration in the planning for the upcoming conflict.

At times, an oppressive regime faced with strong resistance may inflict extreme repression and brutalities. Consideration must also be given to psychological, social, economic, and political countermeasures that may be employed by the opponents. The capacity and willingness of the resisting population to persist in their struggle for liberation despite repression, and other counteractions by the opponents, also need to be assessed.

(2) In-depth knowledge of the nature and operation of the technique of nonviolent action

This nonviolent technique is generally poorly known and inadequately understood. Many people have erroneous preconceptions about it. They may believe they understand it well, but the reality is often very different.

In some ways nonviolent struggle is very simple. In other ways the technique is extremely complex. More than an elementary under-

standing of this phenomenon is required to make possible wise and effective strategic planning. No one can plan a wise grand strategy that will place heavy reliance on the use of nonviolent struggle, and strategies for individual component campaigns, without first understanding this technique extremely well.

The widespread inadequacy of existing knowledge and understanding of this technique means that groups and persons who recognize the possible usefulness of nonviolent struggle should not rush into action without first undertaking careful study and making wise preparations.

Nor should they attempt immediately to participate in formulating a grand strategy for the overall struggle, nor for individual strategies for component limited campaigns. Recognizing what one does not know can be very helpful in guarding against simplistic and dangerous presumptions that can lead to problems and disasters.

The dearth of sound knowledge of this technique is present almost everywhere. It has begun to be corrected in English language publications only in recent decades.

Although far from perfect, much of the available needed knowledge and understanding required for participation in strategic planning now exists in published studies in the English language. In other languages the availability of this knowledge is more sparse. Also, exact equivalents in terminology in other languages almost never have existed. Concepts and terminology were earlier very inadequate or absent also in English language studies. This situation has made translations of existing literature from English into other languages more difficult.

The efforts to achieve new knowledge and understanding of nonviolent struggle has required and produced both new terminology and revised definitions.¹⁶ These have made possible improved communication of important key concepts and ideas.¹⁷ Translations into several other languages of both certain key terms and also some

¹⁶ See the new technical Dictionary of Civilian Struggle by Gene Sharp now awaiting publication.

¹⁷ "A Guide to Translating Texts on Nonviolent Struggle" is available on the Albert Einstein Institution web site: www.aeinstein.org

important texts are available on the website of the Albert Einstein Institution.¹⁸

Most of the readings on nonviolent action recommended here are by a single author. It is regrettable that this is the case, and that the field of nonviolent struggle against oppression has not been as fully studied and considered as it merits. The selection of readings has been made, however, on the basis of content, not authorship. Equivalent studies by other authors that cover exactly the same content as the recommended readings have not been identified. Important other existing studies of nonviolent action not listed here can be useful later as supplementary readings.

The selection of the recommended texts here has been made on the assumption that the readers are primarily interested in the possible future application of this technique against a dictatorship. However, as noted earlier, these readings may also be useful in preparation for facing other acute conflicts, especially those aimed at replacing social and economic oppression with more just policies and institutions.

Offering guided study at a time when people think they are ready for action can be perplexing, and even annoying, to them. A common response has been repeatedly observed.

People who are thinking about using nonviolent struggle in the future generally assume that they already understand this option adequately and therefore have no need to spend time on more reading. That is almost never the case.

Such an attitude and habit are, at best, prescriptions for inadequate strategic planning, and, at worst, precursors of disaster.

Outside assistance?

Some people who recognize that they lack deep knowledge of nonviolent struggle turn to outsiders for guidance on what they should do. They may find individuals and groups who are eager to advise and who offer to help.

¹⁸ www.aeinstein.org

However, accepting those offers can at times be as dangerous as deciding how to conduct such a conflict without in-depth understanding of nonviolent struggle. Outside resource persons cannot have intimate knowledge of the particular conflict situation, nor the current political situation, nor the historical background. The outsiders may not even understand nonviolent struggle in-depth. The guidance they may offer may be unwise, potentially resulting in defeat and massive casualties.

Additionally, external assistance is not empowering. The people who receive external advice to resolve their difficulties will still be dependent on others to deal with their problems.

Furthermore, the guidance provided by outsiders can on occasion be primarily motivated by the desire to achieve the objectives of the outside group giving the advice, instead of the objectives of the population facing the oppression. At times, asking outsiders for guidance on what resisters should do can even result in a loss of control of the struggle to the outsiders. Erroneous and superficial advice can do great harm.

It can happen that outsiders offering to assist a nonviolent struggle group also offer money to the resisters, who often are in difficult financial straits. Extreme care is merited in such instances.

Such financial assistance may be offered by individuals, organizations, or intelligence agencies. The financial assistance may later be revealed to be linked to controls of one type or another. If the controls are accepted, the resisters have lost their ability to determine their own course of action. If the controls are not accepted, the financial support may be severed. If the financial assistance comes from an intelligence agency, changes in the policy of the sponsoring government may cause an abrupt termination of funding.

Additionally, the record of the worst of past “dirty tricks” involving an intelligence agency and its government makes any ties to them by a democratic liberation movement of doubtful wisdom and greatly increases the movement’s vulnerability. Revelations that the resisters have been funded by an intelligence agency may tarnish the movement badly and contribute to discrediting the resisters as tools

of a hostile foreign government. This can have drastic consequences on the work of the receiving resistance movement.

Such realities make more understandable Gandhi's strong caution to resisters that they not depend on outside financial support.

Seeking in-depth knowledge

Attempting to plan strategies for a future nonviolent conflict without adequate background and knowledge is like an eager young student going into a chemistry laboratory, and randomly mixing unknown elements and compounds together, without studying the books on chemistry first. Without in-depth knowledge of nonviolent action persons recommending a certain course of action are likely to cause great damage to the movement.

An equivalent to the Hippocratic oath in medicine is needed for efforts to spread knowledge of nonviolent struggle: *First, do no harm*. To heed that warning, it is necessary to know what harms the application of nonviolent struggle.

In order to meet the need for in-depth understanding of nonviolent action, major attention is needed to study available examinations of the technique. The following designated readings have been selected for study in a precise recommended sequence. It is not wise to pick and choose among these, to shift the order of the readings, to substitute other readings, or to skip any reading. Later, additional and diverse readings may be useful, but not at present. Unless otherwise stated, these readings are by Gene Sharp.

Introductory readings

For an analysis of vulnerabilities of dictatorships to nonviolent resistance: read "Facing Dictatorships with Confidence" in *Social Power and Political Freedom*, pp. 91-112. Pages: 21.

A concise introduction to nonviolent action is provided in: "There Are Realistic Alternatives," pp. 1-48. Pages: 48.

For an exploration of realistic ways to deal with dictatorships, read: "From Dictatorship to Democracy," pp. viii-x, 1-90. Pages: 93.

Intermediate readings

A power analysis of nonviolent action is in: Robert L. Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*: pp. ix-xii, 1-45, and 67-86. Pages: 69.

More on nonviolent action in conflicts is in: *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, pp. 13-65, 359-430. Pages: 125. Total pages to this point: 436.

Readings for strategic planning and choosing methods

For an introduction to strategic planning, review: *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pages 492-495; read: *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, pp. 433-446; Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, pp. 87-99. Pages: 31.

On removing the sources of power read: *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 11-12 and 744-755. Pages: 14.

On the redistribution of political power, read: *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, pp. 423-430. Pages: 8.

Guidance for preparing a strategy is offered in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 495-510; and *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, pp. 433-508. Pages: 102.

For a discussion of how to uproot oppression with minimal casualties and maximum effectiveness, read: *Social Power and Political Freedom*, pp. 161-179. Pages: 19.

On the importance of nongovernmental institutions, read: *Social Power and Political Freedom*, pp. 21-67. Pages: 47.

For an analysis of the relationship of the technique of struggle to social structure, read *Social Power and Political Freedom*, pp. 309-378. Pages: 70.

For discussion of additional aspects of nonviolent action, read: Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, 101-143. Pages: 43. Total pages to this point: 770.

These readings can provide understanding that will be very useful in planning a struggle against opponents who are well entrenched. These opponents are most unlikely to give up their control and domination without a fight. Wise informed action in these situations can greatly increase the odds of achieving success, while reducing casualties.

It is assumed that resistance plans are being made, at least partially, on the basis of a strategic estimate. During the course of a major nonviolent conflict, both the power potential and the actual mobilized power of the two sides are certain to change. New attention will therefore be required to the balance of forces between the contenders. When the actual power of one or both sides has changed, it is wise to conduct a new strategic estimate that can be used in developing plans for the next phase of the conflict.

New attention will therefore be required to the balance of forces between the contenders. It is therefore wise to conduct a new strategic estimate that can be used in developing plans for the next phase of the conflict.

Wise nonviolent struggle is more likely than other means to achieve this liberation because the application of this technique diffuses effective power throughout the society. This diffusion occurs in two ways:

- The population becomes experienced in the application of this type of action that can, with care, be used against any present or future oppression.
- The application of nonviolent struggle strengthens, and helps to create, independent institutions outside of the control of the State. These institutions and groups can be called loci of power, “places” where power resides and from which power can be applied. These institutions can when needed serve as bases for organized resistance. Individual protests and defiance may be noble and heroic, but successful resistance to end oppression requires corporate resistance and defiance.

A word of caution is appropriate here, however. A strategy that can be effective does not come automatically by studying these readings. These sequenced selections can be very helpful, but alone they do not guarantee that the readers will be able to develop wise strategies. Something additional is required.

(3) The ability to think and plan strategically

Persons who wish to plan a wise strategy to remove oppression will need to increase their capacities in the following ways:

- They will need to study the recommendations for planning strategies.
- They will need to think for themselves, and plan wisely.
- They will need to prepare to assume responsibility.
- They will need to develop their abilities to think strategically and to plan strategies competently.

In other words, the planners need to think how the group can act so that the resisters actually contribute to achieving their objec-

tives. All this needs to be done in the context of the struggle with dictatorial or dominating opponents who are likely to be willing and able to inflict harsh repression.

“To think strategically” means to calculate how to act realistically in ways that change the situation so that achievement of the desired goal becomes more possible. This is very different from simply asserting its desirability, or declaring opposition to the current system.

Calculating how to achieve the long-term goal includes calculating what actions one can take that can bring closer achievement of the desired goal. The planning of the long-term grand strategy will need to pay keen attention to the several anticipated future limited campaigns of the long-term conflict.

These plans will need to include how the long-term conflict is to begin, how the activities are to develop, and how sub-strategies and individual campaigns for limited issues should contribute to achieving finally the main goal.

Thinking strategically also means that one needs to learn how to counteract the actions by the opponents and by any persons or groups who want the nonviolent struggle to fail.

Basic strategic considerations: the sources of power of the opponents

Realistic strategic planning requires identification of the sources of power of the opponents, and examination of whether, and if so how, the resisters can reduce or sever the supply of those sources.

In Serbia, in planning the undermining of the Milosovic dictatorship, Srdja Popovic and his colleagues focused on the identified six sources of political power of any ruler.

Review: *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 11-12 and pp. 744-755. No new readings.

The identified six sources of power are authority (legitimacy), human resources, skills and knowledge, intangible factors, material

resources, and sanctions (punishments). The supply to the rulers of all six sources is made possible by the support, assistance, obedience, and cooperation of the population and institutions of the society. The groups and institutions that supply to the rulers the necessary sources of power have been called by Robert L. Helvey the “pillars of support” for the regime.

These groups and institutions are not guaranteed to supply the sources of power. The degree of their support will always vary somewhat, and may be deliberately changed. When the pillars of support become unreliable, when they shrink or even sever the supply of the six sources of power, the oppressive regime is weakened. If the supply of the necessary sources of power is severed, the oppressive regime can potentially be made powerless and be disintegrated.

These insights and the Serbian experience suggest that a major factor in formulating a grand strategy needs to be the test of whether each resistance campaign will weaken or strengthen the opponents’ power. This also applies to evaluating possible strategies and objectives that are intended for limited campaigns.

The converse is at least equally relevant: Will the sources of the resisters’ power be strengthened or weakened by each limited campaign?

Strategic planners need to consider these questions seriously.

Basic strategic considerations: the balance of dependencies

Acts of social, economic, and political noncooperation (also called boycotts) constitute major classes of the available methods of nonviolent struggle.

These methods can only have major impacts on the opponents if the refused goods, services, and other sources of power are really needed and if the opponents depend on the resisters for them. If the dependency is for something much needed, noncooperation to restrict or sever the supply is potentially very powerful. If both sides depend on the other side for something important, the conflict is likely to be much more complicated. These realities must be carefully considered in planning a resistance strategy.

The distribution of dependencies and the balance of dependencies will strongly affect the impact of noncooperation. Therefore, questions such as the following need to be answered during strategic planning:

- Which side depends on the other for its necessary goods, services, and sources of power, and to what degree?
- Are the dependencies all in one direction, or do both sides depend on the other in significant ways?
- Does the dependent side, or do the dependent sides, have, or can they create, alternative goods, services and sources of power to replace those that have been shrunk or severed by noncooperation by the other side?

Basic strategic considerations: what is the status of civil society?

A third major factor to be considered is the status of the independent groups and institutions of the society, the *loci* of power, as noted earlier. In preparing the draft strategies, and later in applying them in open conflict, it is important to give major consideration to these institutions that are not under the control of the State structure.

These *loci of power* may have diverse purposes, many of them completely nonpolitical. Some may be explicitly political. The application of the power potential of these loci of power may be simply enlightening (as in education), or may shake the system (as in noncooperation by the civil service), or may even end the oppression (as in disintegration of the opponents' administration and enforcement).

Cumulatively, these groups and institutions are often called "civil society." If the society has these *loci* of power in significant numbers and strengths, they can be bases for empowerment of the population in the democratization struggle. These *loci* can greatly help the resisting population to conduct noncooperation that is intended to restrict or sever the regime's sources of power. By providing solidarity and support such bodies can also help the population

to withstand extremely brutal repression.

If the society does not have these *loci* of power in significant numbers and strengths, their weaknesses or absence will need to be considered in the planning of the grand strategy and strategies for individual component campaigns. The early steps of a long-term struggle intended to end the dictatorship will therefore need to be highly limited and carefully staged.

If the long-term struggle is to be strong enough to end the oppression, it almost certainly will be necessary for loci of power to exist, to emerge, or to be consciously created and mobilized. Strengthening or creating these *loci* of power must then be a priority.

Such *loci*, in the forms of various "councils," emerged during the 1956-1957 Hungarian Revolution before the struggle was shifted to military means when the Hungarian Army attempted to fight the military forces of the Soviet Union. After the military struggle was crushed a second nonviolent struggle phase was waged.

The status and condition of the *loci* of power requires attention by the drafters of strategy.

Basic strategic considerations: do the campaign objectives and activities aggravate weaknesses of the oppressive system?

A fourth major factor to be considered in the planning of the grand strategy and strategies for component campaigns is whether the objectives and activities aggravate inherent weaknesses of an extreme dictatorship or other oppressive system.

Contrary to popular assumptions, extreme dictatorships and other systems of domination are not as permanently powerful as the image they present and as is often attributed to them. These regimes actually have internal problems and dynamics that tend over time to weaken their central control and survival. Resistance activities that aggravate these inherent weaknesses are likely to have greater impact than those activities that do not.

For a listing of weaknesses of extreme dictatorships, read: *Social Power and Political Freedom*, pp. 100-101. Pages: 2. Total pages to this point: 772.

The operating hypothesis here is that the actions that aggravate pre-existing vulnerabilities are likely to have more serious detrimental impacts on the dictatorship than those actions that do not have that effect.

Basic strategic considerations: the importance of the initiative in the conflict

For achieving effective nonviolent struggles it is important that the resisters both seize the initiative at the beginning and also maintain it throughout the conflict. The resisters must not permit themselves to be relegated to the role of primarily reacting to the actions of their opponents.

Maintenance of the initiative is possible even when the results of the strategic estimate at first show that the established regime is extremely powerful and the resisters appear to be much weaker.

Maintenance of the initiative is relevant both to aggressive and defensive phases of the conflict.

Selecting the strategy drafters

At some point in contemplating a struggle to end the oppression, the persons who are to be charged with preparing a proposed grand strategy for that end will need to be selected. The personnel of a drafting group need to be considered very carefully, because not everyone who is eager to participate may be the most wise and skilled. Persons who have failed to carry out the essential readings on this subject will not be suitable. Outsiders, who cannot know the country and society in-depth, should not be included in the drafting process.

The participation of poorly informed, dogmatic, or self-centered persons in the planning of a future nonviolent struggle can produce disasters. Additionally, it is important that the planners not be individuals with personal agendas that can interfere with the planning process.

Positively, the drafters must be persons who have demonstrated

the capacity to think and plan strategically. Most people do not at a given moment have this capacity.

The drafting will come, of course, only after a great deal of reading, reflecting, and thinking, as outlined in this document.

Above all, the drafting personnel should be competent to produce both a grand strategy and also strategies for component limited campaigns.

The severity of extreme oppression will make the formation and operation of a strategy drafting group extremely difficult and often dangerous. Some persons may need to evade arrest. Resisters will often have difficulty in meeting. Resisters may have informers or *agents provocateurs* among themselves.

Resistance planning groups at time have been able to operate where they would not have been expected. In Nazi-occupied Norway twelve men meeting in the capital constituted a secret leadership group for the country. In Germany itself, secret conspirators plotted to kill Hitler. Near Gestapo headquarters in Berlin, thousands of women rallied outside a temporary prison to demand release of their Jewish husbands. They won.

In some situations exiles can be useful. New technologies in communications can also assist careful planning.

Doubters may point to the fact that strategic planning on this scale and at this depth for waging nonviolent struggle to achieve liberation have never been previously conducted. They may even claim that such planning is not necessary.

Strategic planning will be possible more often than one would expect. Where the situation permits, the aim of the preparation group may be to produce a draft for a grand strategy that will then be evaluated by a wider group.

In some harsh situations an evaluation of a draft grand strategy by a wider group may not be possible. However, under extreme regimes a tiny but wise strategy group may at times be able to plan and disseminate guidance for action. Their recommendations may be tested by measuring the popular response to a call for a miniscule but noticeable relatively safe, action, that needs no further direction. The response could indicate whether more time is needed before an

escalation of opposition occurs or whether the population is ready for a riskier action.

If an evaluation is possible, the draft may be approved, returned for revisions, or set aside with a call for a new proposed grand strategy.

Basic strategy decisions

Early in their deliberations, the strategy planning group will need to decide, at least provisionally, which mechanism of nonviolent action they are aiming to employ: conversion, accommodation, nonviolent coercion, or disintegration. In the context of dictatorships and other serious oppression, the focus almost certainly will be on nonviolent coercion or disintegration.

The persons preparing the draft grand strategy will need to consider whether a single disciplined massive struggle of noncooperation and defiance has the possibility of disintegrating the powerful dictatorship or other system of oppression. That is rare, however, and is far from certain. Otherwise, it will be necessary to plan how to initiate the struggle and how limited struggles can be focused and waged.

The issues for limited campaigns should be ones that can arouse wide support throughout the population. Also, the selected issues should be ones that can be seen to be clearly justified, and be ones that the regime will have difficulty in repudiating. The issues usually should also be ones on which the regime can reluctantly give way or on which the regime might be defeated by empowered people.

Great care is needed in choosing the individual methods of action to apply during various stages of the conflict. Many individual methods exist within the technique of nonviolent action but not all will be wise choices in a particular conflict. Some will prove to be poor choices, and only a few can contribute strongly to achieving success. The methods to be used need to be able to help achieve the objectives of the resisters and help to implement the chosen strategy.

For a discussion of factors involved in the choice of methods to be used, read *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* pp. 501-504. Pages: 4.

Later, as the conflict develops, both the scale of the actions and the specific objectives of the campaigns may be expanded. The regime's counter-measures, especially repression, may also become more harsh, particularly if the resistance is imposing increasingly serious costs on the oppressing regime.

The knowledge and understanding that can be gained through the readings assigned in this guide will help the planners to determine what additional tasks and planning they need to undertake.

Formulating a grand strategy

Consideration of the issues at stake and the leverages available to the potential resisters need to guide development of major characteristics of the grand strategy.

- How do the strengths and weaknesses of the contending groups compare?
- On what issues will it be extremely important to act?
- What are the main leverages to be employed by the resisters?
- Do the issues and the available leverages match?
- How do the leverages available to the resisters relate to shaping the grand strategy for the resisters?
- How do the available leverages of the resisters relate to the identified weaknesses of the opponents?

- Which pillars of support for the dictatorship are potentially vulnerable to application of the leverages available to the resisters?

All this expanded knowledge and understanding will help the strategic planners to develop a wise grand strategy.

The developed grand strategy for the struggle will set the framework for the conduct of the future conflict. Tactics and methods are important but secondary.

For a discussion of basic elements in planning strategies review: *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 495-510. No new readings.

For a presentation of strategic issues and principles through the course of a conflict, read: *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, pp. 447-508. Pages: 62. Total pages to this point: 838.

The planners' first draft of a grand strategy might be initially guided by the thinking of several persons, but the final text may be prepared by a single person or a team. Once drafted, it will need to be critically considered by a larger group, all members of which will need to have studied all of the designated readings. If the first draft of the grand strategy is deemed to be unsuitable, then a full new start may be required, or at least a major revision. If, however, the first draft is judged to be approximately on the correct path, perhaps only relatively limited adjustments may be required at that stage.

If the grand strategy is developed wisely and applied skillfully, there is a good chance that the resisters will be able to greatly enlarge the possibilities of developing an effective liberation movement.

Self-empowerment

In many cases a population living under extreme oppression is likely in comparison to feel weak and powerless, unable to confront the dominating system. That task is often seen as too overwhelm-

ing, and too dangerous. The population feels incapable of winning against such great odds. Instead, the population is largely focused on the simple efforts required to live as best they can. The oppressed population is then largely passive.

This condition has been erroneously called "apathy." The condition is really helplessness.

Care is needed in recommending action when people feel helpless. If at this stage people are nevertheless prodded into public opposition beyond their capacity, their predictable defeat will prove to them that their weakness is even greater than they had realized. It will be a long time before they are able to act again.

However, limited action within their capacity is a different matter. That is more possible. During a major phase of the struggle against apartheid rule in South Africa, it was impossible to mobilize the African population for action against the overwhelming domination, Mosiuoa Patrick Lekota reported in 1990.¹⁹

In this situation, Africans created civic organizations, such as the Soweto Civic Association, to struggle for limited objectives, Lekota continued. These "civics" picked up on specific issues, such as "there is no water, or . . . there is not sufficient electricity. The word 'politics' had to stay out of it . . . People can afford to say 'the government must give us water. . .'"

Accordingly, the Africans in one location were encouraged to organize to get a well to provide clean water. Both the adults and their children had previously been sickened by drinking polluted water. On that single issue the Africans acted and won. By their own action they became empowered, gaining confidence that they could achieve larger goals.

The lesson is that when struggling against great oppression it is often wise to fight on a limited specific expression of the large problem. The limited focus for the attack must then be made carefully. Possible foci that can easily be dismissed as undesirable need to be rejected. The selected specific issue must be seen to be obvi-

¹⁹ Mosiuoa Patrick Lekota, then of the United Democratic Front, speaking at the National Conference on Nonviolent Sanctions in Conflict and Defense, February 8-11, 1990. Cambridge, Massachusetts, sponsored by the Albert Einstein Institution.

ously justified.²⁰

One's power needs to be concentrated against the opponents' weakest points in ways that make victory more likely.

For a discussion of sharpening the focus for attack, read: *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 471-473. Pages: 3.

At the beginning of the long-term conflict the general population likely will still be gaining both self-confidence and also experience in mobilizing their power potential into effective power. Limited popular successes at this point have the potential to remove specific problems while empowering the population. These will greatly increase the chances of achieving liberation.

During these limited struggles the dictatorship or other system of oppression becomes increasingly vulnerable. Success in limited campaigns at this stage can greatly assist the growth of an irresistible democratic movement.

In some situations where the sense of helplessness is not extreme, it may nevertheless be useful to make demands specific. Accordingly, in 1930 in planning a campaign that really was for Indian independence, Gandhi formulated eleven specific demands. These included abolition of the salt tax. Indian National Congress leaders were skeptical. Gandhi maintained that these demands, when achieved, would provide the substance of independence.²¹ The reality was that the struggle for specific objectives would help in mobilizing the Indian population while weakening British colonial rule.

Almost always in a liberation struggle, the long-term conflict needs to proceed in phases, each phase building on the preceding efforts, as the population is able to act and as the situation requires. Each phase can be accomplished by a campaign focused on gaining a single objective or very few objectives.

For each campaign the strategy planners will need to choose

²⁰ See Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 471-473.

²¹ See Sharp, *Gandhi Wields the Weapon of Moral Power*, pp. 59-60 and 71-72. Ahmedabad: Navavian, 1960.

a point, or very few points, of attack. These need to be specific aspects of the larger problem that symbolize the “evil,” an aspect that is least justifiable, and against which the greatest strength can be mobilized.

In most cases of efforts to remove a dictatorship or other oppression several limited campaigns aimed at limited issues will be required. Successes in these campaigns will not only correct the specific wrongs at issue. These campaigns will also contribute to increasing the resisters’ power capacity simultaneously as the opponents’ effective power is reduced.

Under rare circumstances it can happen that a campaign about a limited issue is unexpectedly met with such strong noncooperation and defiance, that the resulting power sweeps away the general system of oppression. However, future strategy planners should not count on that happening.

In rare situations the population may already be confident of their power potential. They may already have the self-confidence and ability to bypass campaigns on limited grievances and be ready to act to end the whole system of oppression. The independence struggles of the three Baltic nations culminating in success in 1991 are examples of this. Such possibilities, however, are the exception. Almost always campaigns about limited issues will be required.

Escalating liberation

Early in a long-term struggle against a dictatorship or other oppression, initial small actions for limited objectives should be made. These actions should be ones that involve low risks and that can be undertaken for short periods of time. Such actions can attract attention and launch the struggle, at times without putting the participants in extreme danger. These small actions can not only make gains on issues, but also contribute to limited shifts in power relationships.

Later, as the conflict develops, both the scale of the actions and the specific objectives of the campaigns may be expanded. The regime’s counter-measures, especially repression, may become

harsher. This is particularly the case if the resistance is imposing increasingly serious costs on the oppressing regime.

The developed strategy needs to undermine, directly or indirectly, the repressive regime's pillars of support, discussed earlier. That undermining can shrink or sever the supply of the necessary sources of power. This happened in Serbia in the struggle against the Milosovic: first its legitimacy was removed, then the population moved from passivity to noncooperation and defiance, and finally the regime's forces of repression became unreliable. When the dictators' sources of power are cut off, the regime faces collapse.

Whether *this* happens depends in large part on whether the prepared strategy was wise and whether it was applied skillfully.

Steps toward the possible

Despite the difficulties, these actions are within the capacities of so-called ordinary people. They can study, think, work hard, build their power bases, and prepare competently. The planners need to calculate what they need to do in order to achieve their goals. Then, courageous action will be required. The resisters will need to move systematically, one step at a time, toward their goal. If all this is done wisely and skillfully, the experience can confirm that oppressed people can become more confident of their capacities for self-liberation.

The aim here has been to explore how people can go beyond past experience, without dependence on political messiahs who may never come, or who may not always be wise.

- How can people increase the chances of lasting successes even against the most brutal regimes, while minimizing casualties?
- How can people liberate themselves and develop the capacity to prevent the return of any system of oppression as they proceed to build a more free, democratic, and just society?

The recommendations for strategic planning in this document are presented in order to make nonviolent struggle to undermine an oppressive system more effective than past improvised efforts.

Blocking a new dictatorship

If the goal of the resisters' struggle is to replace a system of oppression with a more democratic, free, and just system, it will also be necessary to calculate how to prevent an initial success from being stolen by a coup d'état. A coup may occur during the course of the struggle or near the end of the conflict.

When the dictatorship or other oppression is seriously weakened, and the regime shows signs of indecision, or makes mistakes in its efforts to end the prodemocracy movement, a coup may be staged. At times a coup may be initiated by elements within the regime itself, as occurred in Poland by General Wojcieh Jaruzelski in December 1981. In the midst of the massive nonviolent Solidarity struggle it became clear that even the Communist Party was no longer reliable but was on the verge of collapse.

A coup may also be conducted with the intent of crushing the nonviolent struggle movement ruthlessly and preserving the dictatorship or other oppression. This was done in Burma in September 1988, after the nonviolent struggle had brought down three military-controlled governments, and while the democratic leaders were unable to agree who among themselves should lead the new democratic government.

Another possibility is that, following a successful undermining of the dictatorship, a separate group with its own motives and objectives may during a period of political instability attempt to seize control of the State apparatus for its own purposes. They may aim to make themselves the new masters. This is what the Bolsheviks did in Russia in October 1917, following the successful predominantly nonviolent February Revolution that ended the tsarist system.

Strategic planners of a nonviolent struggle for democratic change need to include provisions on how to prevent and defeat a coup d'état, whatever its stated objectives.

An analysis and program to prevent and defeat coups is offered in: Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins, “The Anti-Coup,” pp. 1-59. Pages: 59. Total pages: 900.

Liberation, not perfection

Successfully bringing down a dictatorship, or other oppression, will not immediately produce a near-perfect new system. It will, however, be a major improvement over the past, and the old order will be largely gone. The new political order will be one that can allow progressive improvements to grow and succeed, as may be required by the society’s needs and popular decisions. The way will have been opened for building a durable, free, democratic and participatory system.

Many additional efforts will be required to build on this opportunity to make continuing improvements in the society.²² These efforts may include:

- Preparing to deter and defeat new attempts to subvert democratic political, social, and economic empowerment, and to impose new oppression.
- Strengthening and revitalizing existing civil institutions.
- Building new, more equitable, institutions and strengthening the capacity of civil institutions generally to meet the needs of the society outside of the State structure.

All of these additional efforts, following the initial major liberation, will be far less difficult than they were under the old regime.

Also, the population will be more experienced in waging effective nonviolent struggle than it was previously. Furthermore, the

²² For a discussion of how a major use of nonviolent action contributes to the diffusion of effective power in the society see Gene Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom*, pp, 309-378

population will have strengthened the democratic social, economic, and political institutions through which they can act to deal with remaining problems, and also face new challenges successfully.

The tasks presented in this guide for persons and groups who wish to formulate a strategic plan for the liberation of people living under a dictatorship or other oppression are very great. Some persons may be discouraged and doubt their ability to accomplish these tasks and actually to prepare such a grand strategy for their own liberation.

However, with expanded knowledge and understanding, and step by step efforts, the once impossible effort is revealed to be a series of achievable tasks.

The overall goal makes the effort worthwhile.

Through sound analyses and careful planning, disciplined and courageous action, it is possible to move from the oppressive system to an improved society built on the foundations of responsibility and freedom.

APPENDIX ONE

READINGS

Robert L. Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*. Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2004.

Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins, "The Anti-Coup." Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2003.

Gene Sharp, "From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation" Bangkok: Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma, 1993. Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2003 and 2008.

Gene Sharp, *Social Power and Political Freedom*. Boston: Extending Horizons Books, Porter Sargent Publishers, 1980.

Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (3 vols.). Boston: Extending Horizons Books, Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973 and later printings.

Gene Sharp, "There Are Realistic Alternatives." Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2003.

Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*. Boston: Extending Horizons Books, Porter Sargent Publishers, 2005.

APPENDIX TWO

GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS IN NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE*

by Gene Sharp

ACCOMMODATION: A mechanism of change in nonviolent action in which the opponents resolve, while they still have a choice, to agree to a compromise and grant certain demands of the nonviolent resisters. Accommodation occurs when the opponents have neither changed their views nor been nonviolently coerced, but have concluded that a compromise settlement is desirable.

The accommodation may result from influences which, if continued, might have led to the conversion, nonviolent coercion, or disintegration of the opponents' system or regime.

AUTHORITY: The quality which leads the judgments, decisions, recommendations, and orders of certain individuals and institutions to be accepted voluntarily as right and therefore to be implemented by others through obedience or cooperation. Authority is a main source of political power, but is not identical with it.

BOYCOTT: Noncooperation, either socially, economically, or politically.

CIVIC ABSTENTION: A synonym for acts of political noncooperation.

CIVIC ACTION: A synonym for nonviolent action conducted for political purposes.

*This text is distributed for purposes of the Albert Einstein Institution and is not otherwise to be published or translated without written permission of Gene Sharp, Albert Einstein Institution, 427 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02115-1801. These are very limited excerpts from a much longer manuscript that is now in preparation. 17 June 2002.

CIVIC DEFIANCE: Assertive acts of nonviolent protest, resistance or intervention conducted for political purposes.

CIVIC STRIKE: An economic shut-down conducted for political reasons. Not only workers may go on strike, but importantly students, professionals, shopkeepers, white-color workers (including government employees), and members of upper classes usually participated.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: A deliberate peaceful violation of particular laws, decrees, regulations, ordinances, military or police orders, and the like.

These are usually laws which are regarded as inherently immoral, unjust, or tyrannical. Sometimes, however, laws of a largely regulatory or morally neutral character may be disobeyed as a symbol of opposition to wider policies of the government.

CIVIL RESISTANCE: A synonym for nonviolent resistance.

CONVERSION: A change of viewpoint by the opponents against whom nonviolent action has been waged, such that they come to believe it is right to accept the objectives of the nonviolent group. This is one of four mechanisms of change in nonviolent action.

DISINTEGRATION: The fourth mechanism of change in nonviolent action, in which the opponents are not simply coerced, but their system or government is disintegrated and falls apart as a result of massive noncooperation and defiance. The sources of power are restricted or severed by the noncooperation to such an extreme degree that the opponents' system or government simply dissolves.

ECONOMIC SHUT-DOWN: A suspension of the economic activities of a city, area, or country on a sufficient scale to produce economic paralysis. The motives are usually political.

This may be achieved with a general strike by workers while

management, business, commercial institutions, and small shopkeepers close their establishments and halt their economic activities.

FREEDOM (POLITICAL): A political condition which permits freedom of choice and action for individuals and also for individuals and groups to participate in the decisions and operation of the society and the political system.

GRAND STRATEGY: The broadest conception of how an objective is to be attained in a conflict by a chosen course of action. The grand strategy serves to coordinate and direct all appropriate and available resources (human, political, economic, moral, etc.) of the group to attain its objectives in a conflict.

Several more limited strategies may be applied within a grand strategy to achieve particular objectives in subordinate phases of the overall struggle.

GRIEVANCE GROUP: The general population group whose grievances are issues in the conflict, and are being championed by the nonviolent resisters.

HUMAN RESOURCES: A term that is used here to indicate the number of persons and groups who obey "the ruler" (meaning the ruling group in command of the state), cooperate with, or assist the ruling group in implementing their will. This includes the proportion of such persons and groups in the general population, and the extent, forms, and independence of their organizations.

A ruler's power is affected by the availability of these human resources, which constitute one of the sources of political power.

MATERIAL RESOURCES: This is another source of political power. The term refers to property, natural resources, financial resources, the economic system, means of communication, and modes of transportation. The degree to which the ruler controls, or does not control, these helps to determine the extent or limits of the ruler's power.

MECHANISMS OF CHANGE: The processes by which change is achieved in successful cases of nonviolent struggle. The four mechanisms are conversion, accommodation, nonviolent coercion, and disintegration.

METHODS: The specific means of action within the technique of nonviolent action. Nearly two hundred specific methods have thus far been identified. They are classed under three main classes of nonviolent protest and persuasion, noncooperation (social, economic, and political), and nonviolent intervention.

NONCOOPERATION: A large class of methods of nonviolent action that involve deliberate restriction, discontinuance, or withholding of social, economic, or political cooperation (or a combination of these) with a disapproved person, activity, institution, or regime.

The methods of noncooperation are classified in the subcategories of social noncooperation, economic noncooperation (economic boycotts and labor strikes), and political noncooperation.

NONVIOLENCE (RELIGIOUS OR ETHICAL): Beliefs and behavior of several types in which violent acts are prohibited on religious or ethical grounds. In some belief systems, not only physical violence is barred but also hostile thoughts and words. Certain belief systems additionally enjoin positive attitudes and behavior toward opponents, or even a rejection of the concept of opponents.

Such believers often may participate in nonviolent struggles with people practicing nonviolent struggle for pragmatic reasons, or may choose not to do so.

NONVIOLENT ACTION: A general technique of conducting protest, resistance, and intervention without physical violence.

Such action may be conducted by (a) acts of omission — that is, the participants refuse to perform acts which they usually perform, are expected by custom to perform, or are required by law or regulation to perform; or (b) acts of commission — that is, the participants

perform acts which they usually do not perform, are not expected by custom to perform, or are forbidden by law or regulation from performing; or (c) a combination of both.

The technique includes a multitude of specific methods which are grouped into three main classes: nonviolent protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention.

NONVIOLENT COERCION: A mechanism of change in nonviolent action in which demands are achieved against the will of the opponents because effective control of the situation has been taken away from them by widespread noncooperation and defiance. However, the opponents still remain in their official positions and the system has not yet disintegrated.

NONVIOLENT INSURRECTION: A popular political uprising against an established regime regarded as oppressive by use of massive noncooperation and defiance.

NONVIOLENT INTERVENTION: A large class of methods of nonviolent action which in a conflict situation directly interfere by nonviolent means with the opponents' activities and operation of their system. These methods are distinguished from both symbolic protests and noncooperation. The disruptive intervention is most often physical (as in a sit-in) but may be psychological, social, economic, or political.

NONVIOLENT PROTEST AND PERSUASION: A large class of methods of nonviolent action which are symbolic acts expressing opposition opinions or attempting persuasion (as vigils, marches or picketing). These acts extend beyond verbal expressions of opinion but stop short of noncooperation (as a strike) and nonviolent intervention (as a sit-in).

NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE: The waging of determined conflict by strong forms of nonviolent action, especially against determined and resourceful opponents who may respond with repression.

NONVIOLENT WEAPONS: The specific methods of nonviolent action.

PILLARS OF SUPPORT: The institutions and sections of the society which supply the existing regime with the needed sources of power to maintain and expand its power capacity.

Examples are the police, prisons, and military forces supplying sanctions, moral and religious leaders supplying authority (legitimacy), labor groups and business and investment groups supplying economic resources, and similarly with the other identified sources of political power.

POLITICAL DEFIANCE: The strategic application of nonviolent struggle in order to disintegrate a dictatorship and to replace it with a democratic system.

This resistance by noncooperation and defiance mobilizes the power of the oppressed population in order to restrict and cut off the sources of the dictatorship's power. Those sources are provided by groups and institutions called "pillars of support."

When political defiance is used successfully, it can make a nation ungovernable by the current or any future dictatorship and therefore able to preserve a democratic system against possible new threats.

POLITICAL JIU-JITSU: A special process that may operate during a nonviolent struggle to change power relationships. In political jiu-jitsu negative reactions to the opponents' violent repression against nonviolent resisters is turned to operate politically against the opponents, weakening their power position and strengthening that of the nonviolent resisters. This can operate only when violent repression is met with continued nonviolent defiance, not violence or surrender. The opponents' repression is then seen in the worst possible light.

Resulting shifts of opinion are likely to occur among third parties, the general grievance group, and even the opponents' usual supporters. Those shifts may produce both withdrawal of support

for the opponents and increased support for the nonviolent resisters. The result may be widespread condemnation of the opponents, internal opposition among the opponents, and increased resistance. These changes can at times produce major shifts in power relationships in favor of the nonviolent struggle group.

Political jiu-jitsu does not operate in all cases of nonviolent struggle. When it is absent the shift of power relationships depends highly on the extent of noncooperation.

POLITICAL POWER: The totality of influences and pressures available for use to determine and implement official policies for a society. Political power may be wielded by the institutions of government, or in opposition to the government by dissident groups and organizations. Political power may be directly applied in a conflict, or it may be held as a reserve capacity for possible later use.

SANCTIONS: Punishments or reprisals, violent or nonviolent, imposed either because people have failed to act in the expected or desired manner or imposed because people have acted in an unexpected or prohibited manner.

Nonviolent sanctions are less likely than violent ones to be simple reprisals for disobedience and are more likely to be intended to achieve a given objective. Sanctions are a source of political power.

SELF-RELIANCE: The capacity to manage one's own affairs, make one's own judgments, and provide for oneself, one's group or organization, independence, self-determination, and self-sufficiency.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE: A source of political power. The ruler's power is supported by the skills, knowledge and abilities that are provided by persons and groups in the society (human resources) and the relation of those available skills, knowledge and abilities to the ruler's needs for them.

SOURCES OF POWER: These are origins of political power. They include: authority, human resources, skills and knowledge, intangible factors, material resources and sanctions. These derive from the society. Each of these sources is closely associated with and dependent upon, the acceptance, cooperation, and obedience of the population and the society's institutions. With strong supply of these sources the ruler will be powerful. As the supply is weakened or severed, the ruler's power will weaken or collapse.

STRATEGIC NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE: Nonviolent struggle that is applied according to a strategic plan that has been prepared on the basis of analysis of the conflict situation, the strengths and weaknesses of the contending groups, the nature, capacities, and requirements of the technique of nonviolent action, and especially strategic principles of that type of struggle. See also: grand strategy, strategy, tactics, and methods.

STRATEGY: A plan for the conduct of a major phase, or campaign, within a grand strategy for the overall conflict. A strategy is the basic idea of how the struggle of a specific campaign shall develop, and how its separate components shall be fitted together to contribute most advantageously to achieve its objectives.

Strategy operates within the scope of the grand strategy. Tactics and specific methods of action are used in smaller scale operations to implement the strategy for a specific campaign.

STRIKE: A deliberate restriction or suspension of work, usually temporarily, to put pressure on employers to achieve an economic objective or sometimes on the government in order to win a political objective.

TACTIC: A limited plan of action based on a conception of how, in a restricted phase of a conflict, to use effectively the available means of action to achieve a specific limited objective. Tactics are intended for use in implementing a wider strategy in a phase of the overall conflict.

VIOLENCE: Physical violence against other human beings which inflicts injury or death, or threatens to inflict such violence, or any act dependent on such infliction or threat.

Some types of religious or ethical nonviolence conceive of violence much more broadly. This narrower definition permits adherents to those beliefs to cooperate with persons and groups that are prepared on pragmatic grounds to practice nonviolent struggle.